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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to manage students with behavior problems, noting the sharp difference between discipline problems of the 1940's and discipline problems of today (e.g., assault, murder, burglary, arson, and gang warfare). Some teachers are more effective than others in dealing with troubled students. Teachers' personal characteristics and ethics are more important than their theoretical orientation. Teacher attitudes and expectations in turn influence student performance. A student who is treated in a manner that reflects order, fairness, and logical consequences will be more likely to behave in such a way. Students must learn to value appropriate social behaviors while fostering individual responsibility. Teachers must understand student interaction with peers and facilitate appropriate peer interactions. The paper presents 12 suggestions for helping to establish and maintain order for troubled students. The bulk of the paper consists of charts and notes on how to assess student behavior and needs, how to determine what is wrong at the school that needs to be examined, and how to create solutions. (SM)

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TROUBLED STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

REFLECTIONS PRESENTED AT THE SUMMIT ON EDUCATION

Nashville, Tennessee

June 1999

Dr. Nedra Skaggs Wheeler

SP038635

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In 1940 the top seven discipline problems facing American education were: talking; chewing gum; making noise; running in the hall; getting out of turn in line; wearing improper clothes; and not putting paper in wastebaskets. In sharp contrast to these is a list of today's problems: rape; drugs; assault; burglary; arson; murder; extortion; and gang warfare. It should be obvious to anyone that the methods used to effectively deal with the first set of problems will not be adequate to deal effectively with the second group of problems.

The events of this last year have caused many to ponder what teachers and schools are doing to protect themselves and their students. What makes one teacher more effective than another in dealing with troubled students? Personal characteristics and ethics of teachers are more important than their theoretical orientation. Perceived learner characteristics and teacher expectations are directly interrelated; and teacher attitudes and expectations in turn influence performance. The frame of reference through which we perceive the world and its inhabitants is relative to our awareness of the world around us. We hear, speak, touch, see and experience with reference to points against which we measure sensory and emotional stimulation. The

more flexible we are in altering our frame of reference to suit the needs and criteria of situations the more likely that we will be able to understand change that is not compatible with our reference points.

It is not what we tell students but how we treat them. A student who is treated in a manner that reflects order, fairness, and logical consequences will be more likely to behave in such a way. Students must learn to value social behaviors while fostering individual responsibility. Some steps to lessen the problems in schools would include: examining instruction to ensure that expectations are challenging but in line with students abilities; providing stimulating challenging lessons; recording and reinforcing student achievement; modeling respect for all; and treating students with dignity and concern.

It is never sufficient to suppress disruptive behavior before it is understood. Student interaction with peers must be examined. Facilitation of appropriate peer interactions must become a priority of all concerned teachers and schools. It is critical to get to the root of the problem not just treat the superficial symptoms. I have personally found the following list to be quite

helpful in establishing and maintaing order for troubled students.

1. Set your standards clearly and early.
2. Teach a varied, interesting lesson.
3. Let the students know you respect them.
4. Let students know you expect them to respect each other.
5. Be poised, firm and fair.
6. Teach to the positive. NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS.
7. Make discipline quick, consistent, just and inevitable. THE STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN ACTIONS.
8. NEVER ARGUE OR HUMILIATE STUDENTS.
9. Grades are instructional consequences. Don't hold them hostage to behavior.
10. KNOW EACH STUDENT.
11. Document and evaluate any problems for alternative and better solutions.
12. KNOW YOURSELF. Be yourself. Cultivate your own techniques.

If you love teaching your students will gain a love of learning. No one method works in all circumstances. The wise teacher will evaluate and analyze each student that is experiencing difficulty and personalize an individual program to remediate the problem. Flexibility and creativity are necessary to be effective in beginning to deal with the problems facing our schools and students.

Student Outcomes

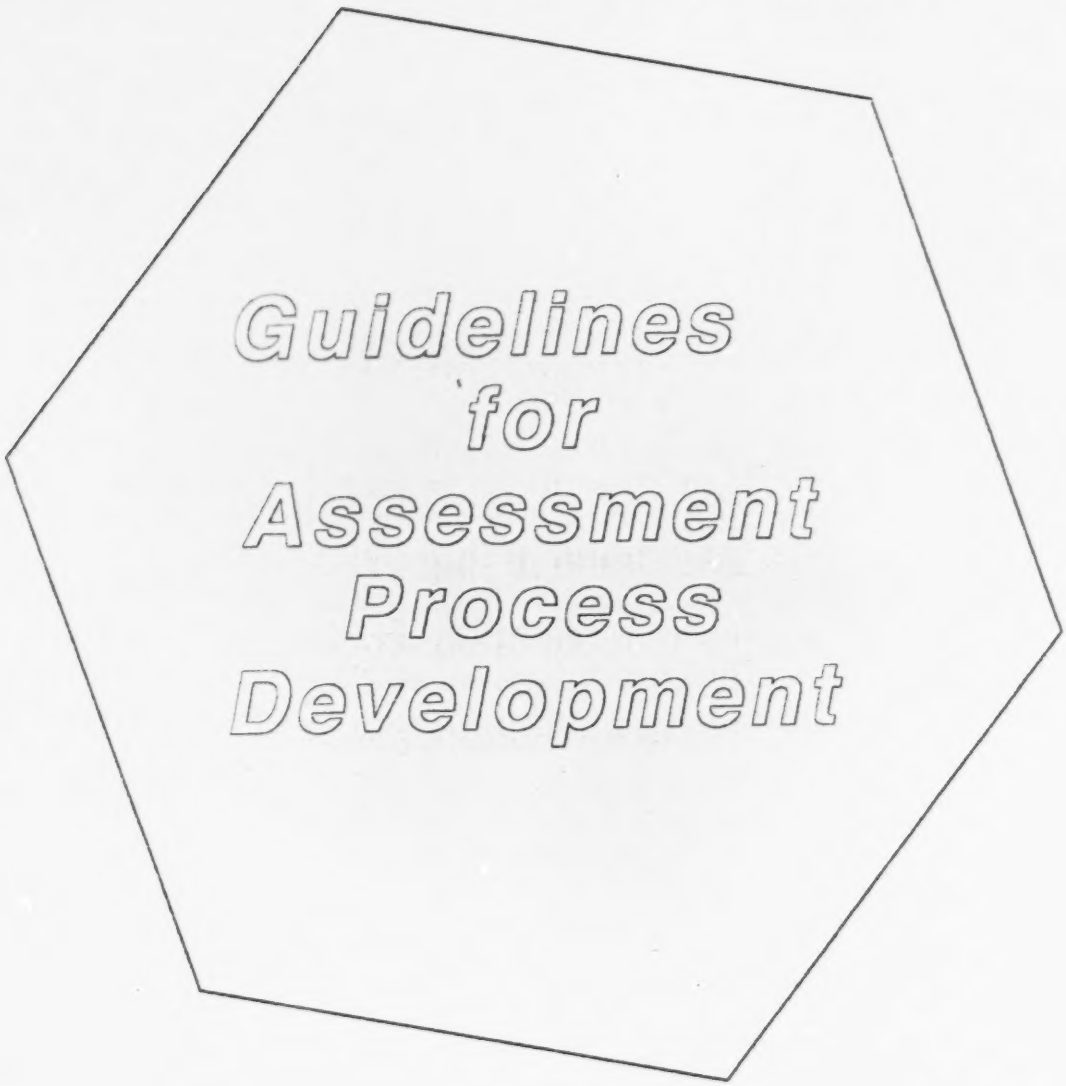
A. Cognitive or Performance

- Teacher-Developed Assessments
- Standardized Assessments
- Portfolios of Students' Work
- Performance Records or Progress Reports
- Grades or Grade Distributions
- Standardized Achievement Tests

Student Outcomes

B. Affective or Behavioral

- Direct Observations or Interviews
- District, School, or Classroom Records
- Self-Report Questionnaires or Surveys
- Self-Assessment Checklists
- Testimonials



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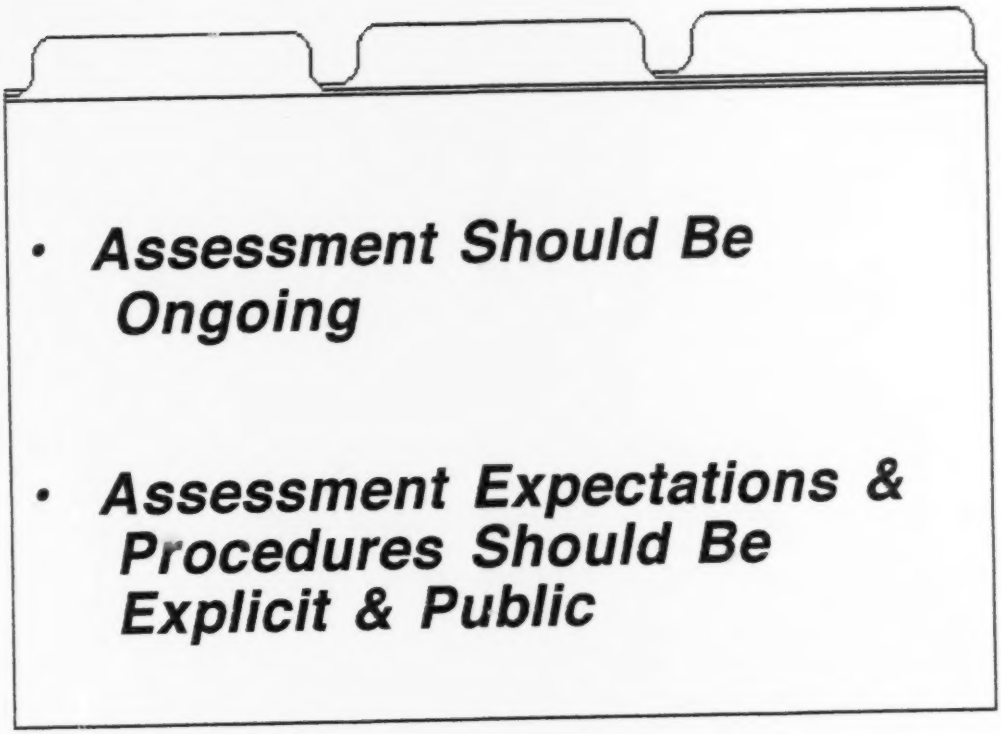
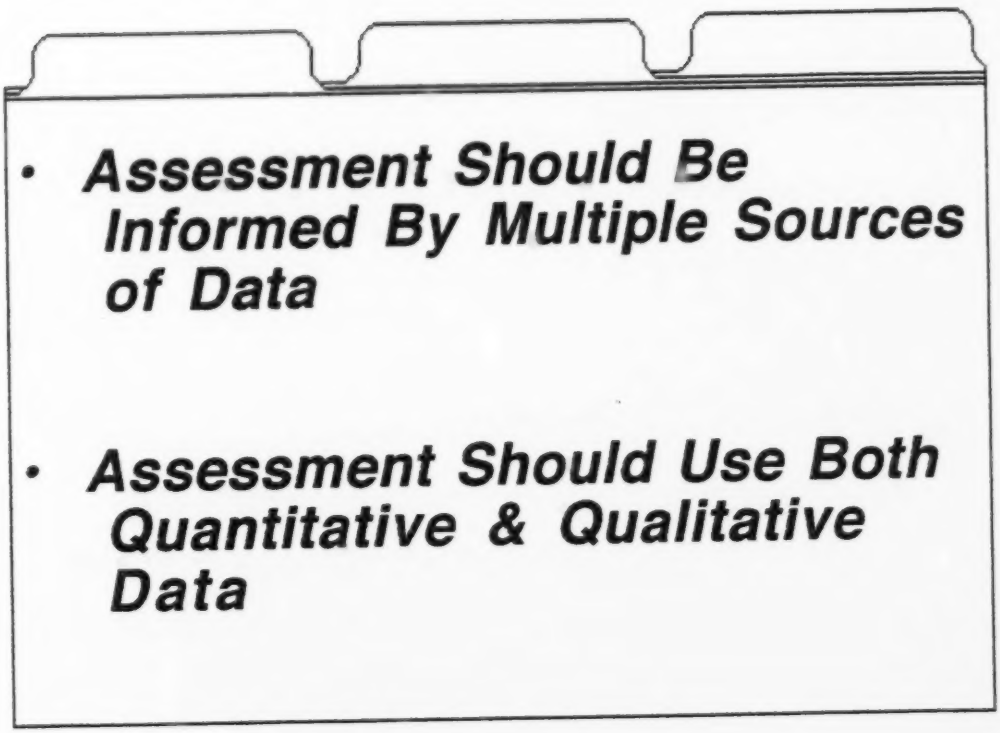
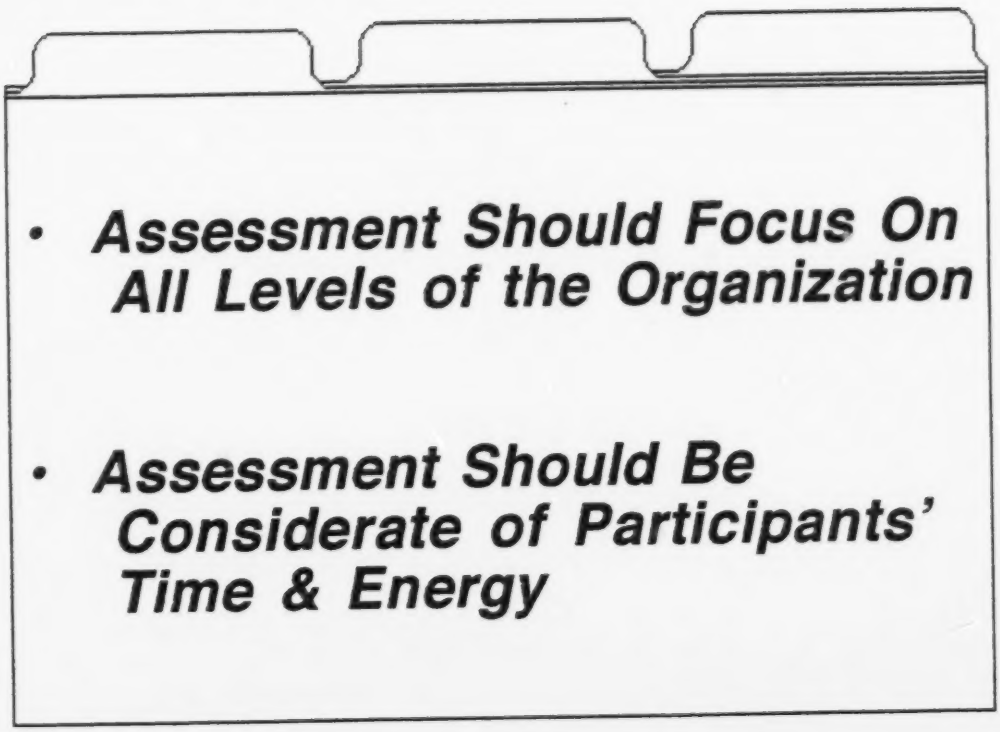
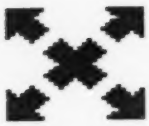

• Assessment Should Be Ongoing
• Assessment Expectations & Procedures Should Be Explicit & Public


• Assessment Should Be Informed By Multiple Sources of Data
• Assessment Should Use Both Quantitative & Qualitative Data

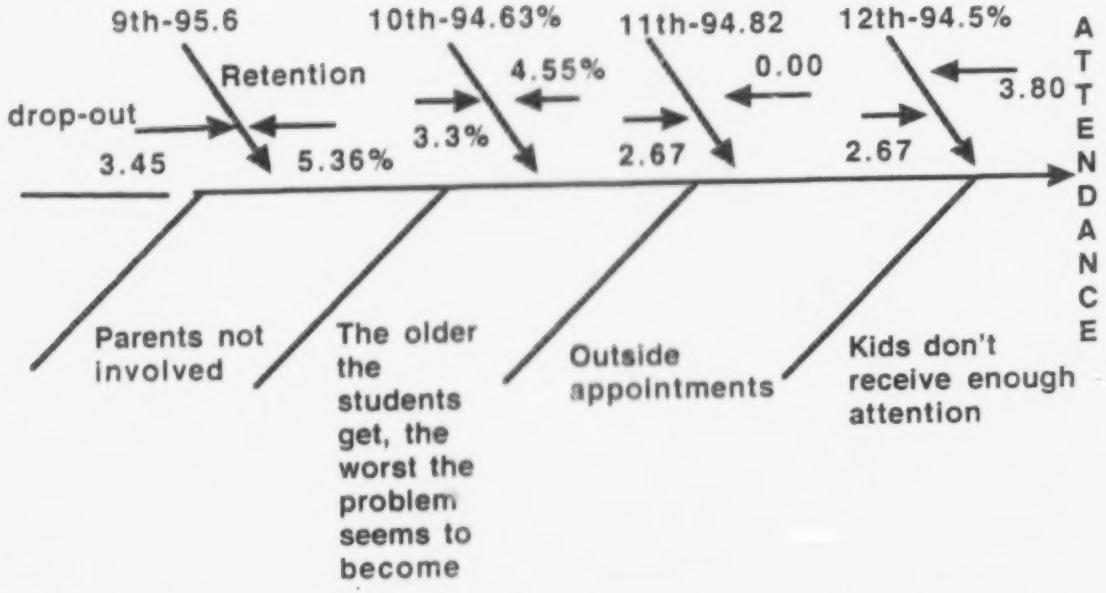

• Assessment Should Focus On All Levels of the Organization
• Assessment Should Be Considerate of Participants' Time & Energy



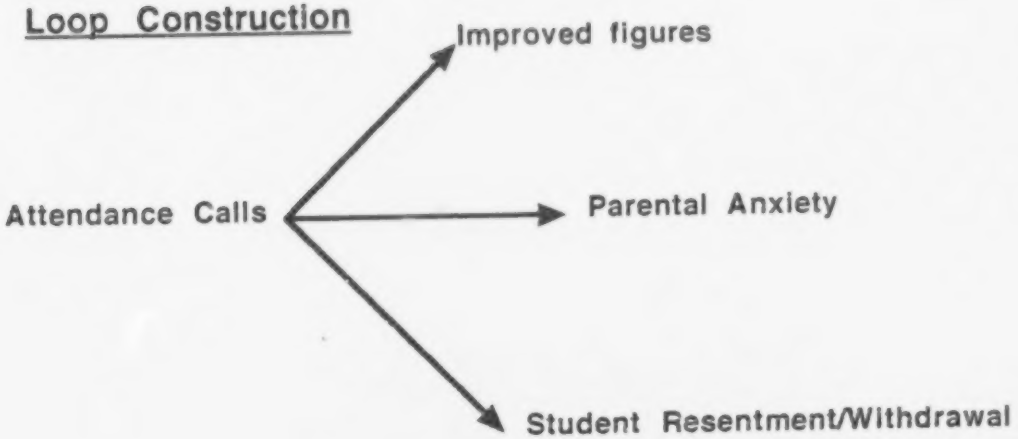
Using the Double Q Diagram with the Transformation Plan

Systems tools and archetypes help you uncover information that is not immediately obvious. In the process of reviewing the Transformation Plan one of the action steps just didn't seem to address the real problem even though it was a "common sense" action to take in response to the problem. Using the Double Q Diagram I placed drop-out, retention hard and soft data up alongside one another and began to think there might be a connection between the seeming pattern of significant retention rates at grades 9 and 10. At grade 11 there were 0% retentions, but at 12 there were 3.80%. While it appears that the 5.36% retention rate at 9th grade and 4.55% at 10th may have resulted in a slightly lower one at the 11th, it is not permanent if these figures are consistent over a period of time. It looks as if there may be a correlation between the three sets of figures. If that is true, then the solution has not been identified by the committee in its' action plan. A solution such as calling parents does not seem to address the real problem. An examination of the soft, perceptive, data seems to confirm what the hard data is saying: Almost 45% of the students felt there was no clearly defined curriculum at the school, 43% did not identify the teaching strategies as effective, and 57% said there was no organized homework policy.

Something more serious is wrong at the school and needs to be examined.



Loop Construction



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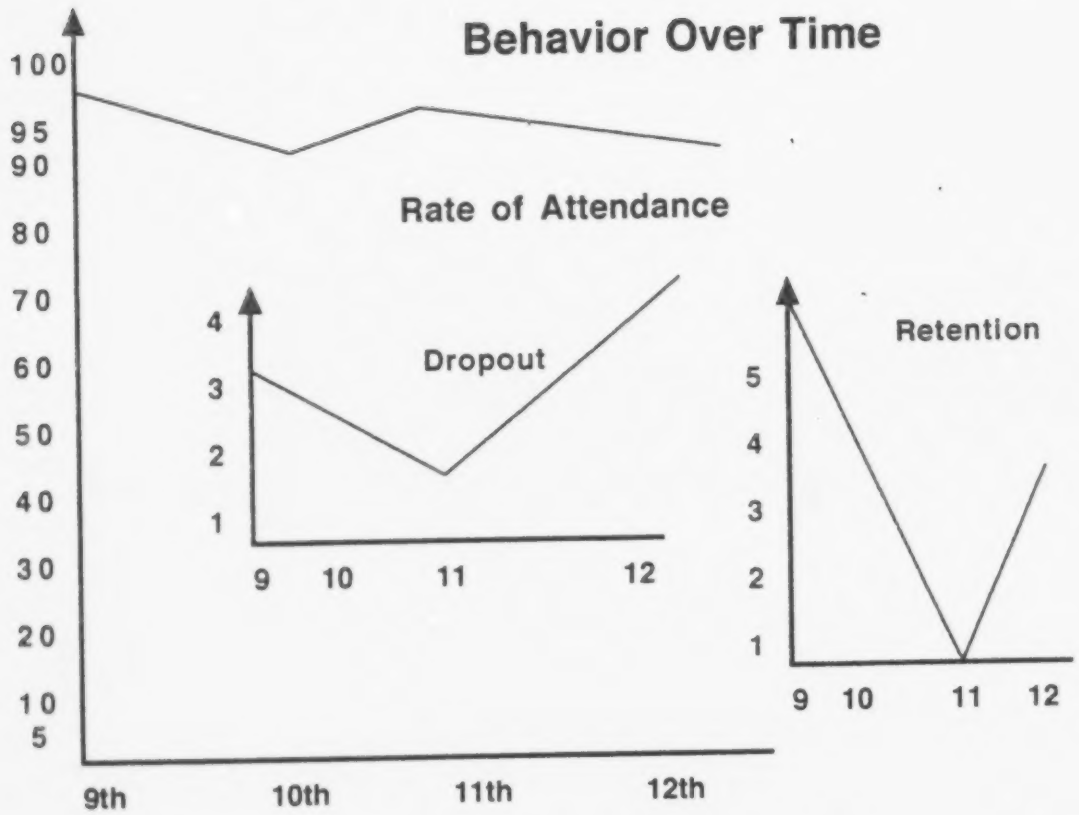
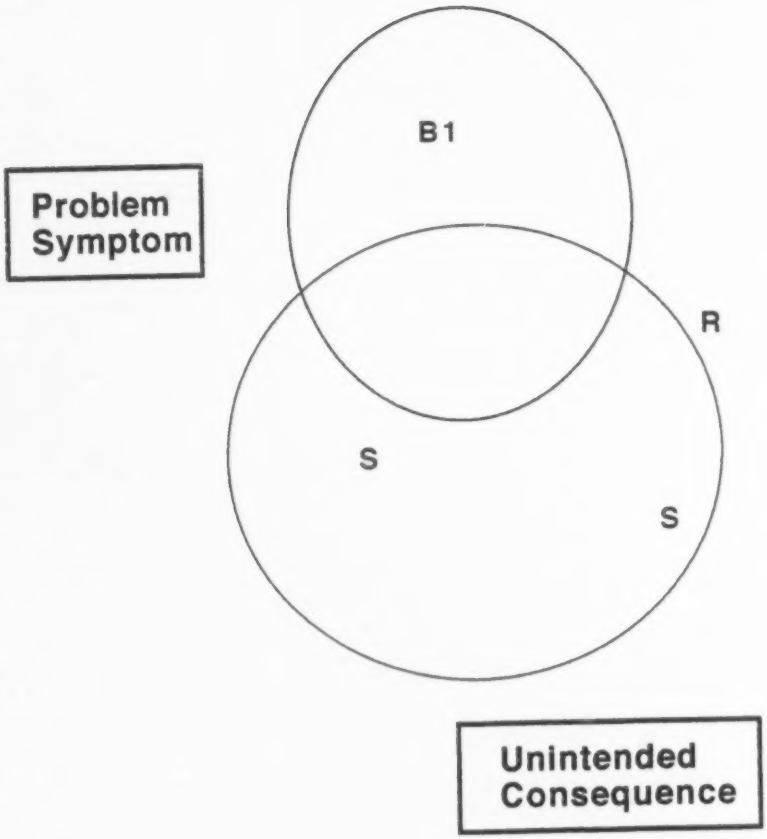


Retention rates are high at 9th and 10th grades with lower dropout and retention rates at grade 11. Attendance is second only to 9th grade. Both retention and drop-out rates are higher at 12th grade level. The number of absences is also higher.



Archetype

Fixes That Fail

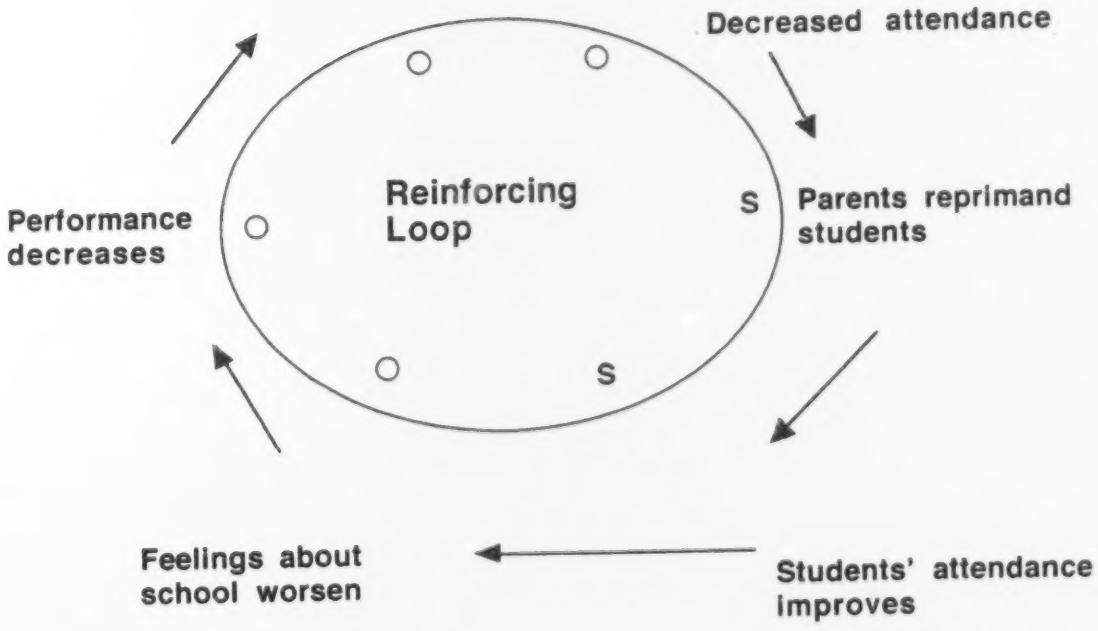
Problem Statement: KIRIS data shows 12th grade as having the most consistent attendance weakness

Activities: Continue to phone parents of absent students to express concern

Systems Tools

Causal Loop

School personnel become concerned



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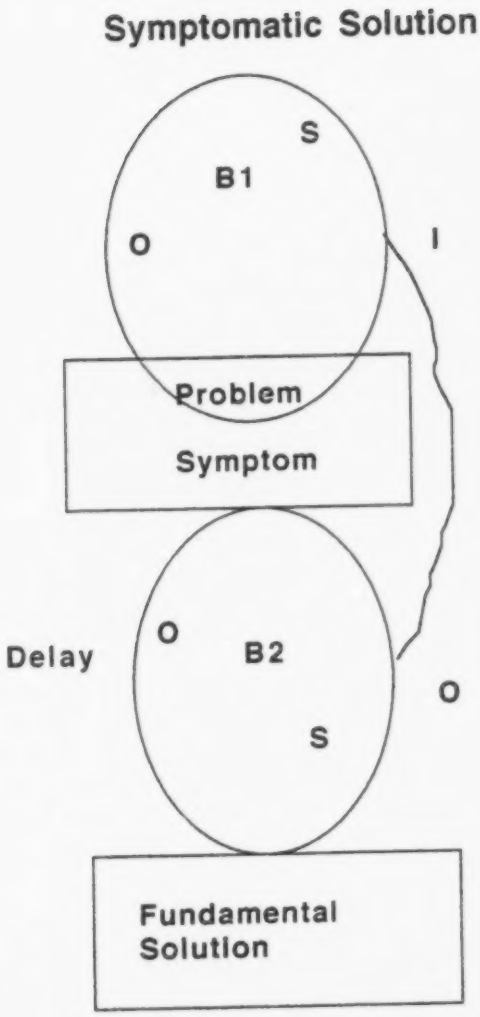

Archetype
Shifting the Burden

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Find the Archetypes in the Story

Market Middle School found its enrollment in its parent organization declining. The school still enjoyed one of the best reputations for "strong academics and curriculum" in the school district, but in the last year, the school has been involved in several reorganizing efforts within the school. Notices for meetings went out late; sometimes, the meetings were canceled altogether. When meetings did occur, only a few of the faculty members attended. Parents began to feel that the school was no longer interested in their involvement and support. When comments were made by some of the parents, administrators at the school assured them that the commitment was still there but continued as before. The parents consulted the teachers of their children but stopped attending meetings.

The Rogers High School faced a crisis situation. Their assessment scores had declined on the state testing and they needed to make improvements in the following year. They made immediate changes in their scheduling, going from a six period day to an eight period day in order to expose students to more course offerings. The school which has had a "family" atmosphere changed almost immediately. Faculty were not able to spend much time with students on a one-to-one basis as they had before. The school had a real commitment to each student. Administrators and teachers kept assuring students as soon as the test scores were up, that things would return to normal. Discipline problems began to occur in the high school in a way that they had not before. Several students were expelled for fighting at sports functions.

John Roberts had been teaching for ten years before he took an additional job outside teaching. He had always wanted to be a teacher, but he wanted additional income in order to renovate his home. He often worked late at night and on weekends. His colleagues commented on the fact that he often seemed tired and drained. His principal commented on the fact that he was late with his lesson plans and that he was bringing more students to the office for discipline problems. Although the grades in his classes had actually risen, the kids and even some of the parents commented that things were just not the same. In the lounge, teachers noticed that John had begun to talk about how most of his students were unmotivated.

The faculty members of Williams High School are very divided. Many of them have taught together for some time and over the years, divisions and factions have developed. Several of the departments are at loggers-head with themselves as well as across departments a with the math, science, and p.e. departments. Performance of the school is suffering, but no one has a solution. The principal who has only been in his position for a couple of years does not want the attention that would come from bringing in an outside expert to help resolve some of the conflict. He has thought about just sitting it out and seeing if anything will develop, but he is not sure if he can do that. He doesn't believe that he can do anything to help though. Previous principals had been involved in the creation of the present tension so the staff is naturally wary of turning to him. He finally decided to bring in someone to assist.